NUMB. CCXIII.

The SPECTATOR.

——Mens ſibi conſcia recti. Virg.

Saturday, November 3. 1711.

…the great Art and Secret of Chriſtianity, if I …y uſe that Phraſe, to manage our Actions to …beſt Advantage, and direct them in ſuch a …ner, that every thing we do may turn to …account at that great Day, when every thing we have …ne ſhall be ſet before us.

…der to give this Conſideration its full weight, …caſt all our Actions under the Diviſion of …ſe as are in themſelves either Good, Evil or In-…ifferent.

If we divide our Intentions after the ſame …anner, and conſider them with regard to our Acti-…ns, we may diſcover that great Art and Secret of …ife which I have here mentioned.

…A Good Intention joined to a Good Action, gives …t new Force and Efficacy; joined to an Evil …ction, extenuates its Malignity, and in ſome caſes …kes it wholly away; and joined to an Indiffe-…ent Action, turns it to a Virtue, and makes it me-…itorious, as far as Human Actions can be ſo.

In the next Place, to conſider in the ſame manner …he Influence of an Evil Intention upon our Actions. …An Evil Intention perverts the beſt of Actions, and …makes them in reality what the Fathers with a witty …Zeal have termed the Vertues of the Heathens, ſo many *ſhining Sins*. It deſtroys the …Merit of an Indifferent Action, and gives an …Action all poſſible Blackneſs and Horror, or …in the Metaphorical Language of Sacred Writ makes …it altogether *Sinful*.

In the laſt Place, we conſider the Nature of an …Evil Intention, we ſhall find that it deſtroys …the Merit of a Good Action; abates, but never takes …off the Malignity of an Evil Action; and leaves …an Indifferent Action in its natural ſtate of Indiffe-…rence.

…Nothing therefore of unſpeakable Advantage to poſſeſs …the Mind with an habitual Good Intention, and to …purify all our Thoughts, Words and Actions at ſome …time or other, whether it be the Glory of our Maker, …the Good of Mankind, or the Benefit of our own …Perſon that we have in view.

…This is a ſort of Thrift or Good Husbandry in …Religious Life, which does not throw away any ſingle …Action, but makes every one go as far as it can. …It multiplies the Means of Salvation, encreaſes the …Number of our Vertues, and diminiſhes that of our …Sins.

…There is ſomething very Devout, though not ſo …Great in *Acoſta*'s Anſwer to *Limborch*, who Ob-…jects to him the Multiplicity of Ceremonies in the Jewiſh Religion, as Waſhings, Dreſſes, Meats, Purgations, and the like. The Reply which the Jew makes upon this Occaſion, is, to the beſt of my Remembrance, as follows: 'There are not Duties e-'nough (ſays he) in the eſſential Parts of the Law for 'a zealous and active Obedience. Time, Place and 'Perſon are requiſite, before you have an Opportu-'nity of putting a Moral Vertue into Practice. We 'have therefore, ſays he, enlarged the Sphere of our 'Duty, and made many things which are in them-'ſelves Indifferent a Part of our Religion, that we 'may have more Occaſions of ſhewing our Love 'to God, and in all the Circumſtances of Life be 'doing ſomething to pleaſe him.

Monſieur *St. Evremont* has endeavoured to palliate the Superſtitions of the Roman Catholick Religion with the ſame kind of Apology, where he pretends to conſider the different Spirit of the Papiſts and the Calviniſts, as to the great Points wherein they diſagree. He tells us, that the former are actuated by Love, and the other by Fear; and that in their Expreſſions of Duty and Devotion towards the Supreme Being, the former ſeem particularly careful to do every thing which may poſſibly pleaſe him, and the other to abſtain from every thing which may poſſibly diſpleaſe him.

But notwithſtanding this plauſible Reaſon with which both the Jew and the Roman Catholick would excuſe their reſpective Superſtitions, it is certain there is ſomething in them very pernicious to Mankind, and deſtructive to Religion. Becauſe, the Injunction of ſuperfluous Ceremonies makes ſuch Actions Duties, as were before indifferent, and by that means renders Religion more burdenſome and difficult than it is in its own Nature, betrays many into Sins of Omiſſion, which they could not otherwiſe be guilty of, and fixes the Minds of the Vulgar to the ſhadowy uneſſential Points, inſtead of the more weighty and more important Matters of the Law.

This zealous and active Obedience however takes Place in the great Point we are recommending; for if, inſtead of preſcribing to our ſelves indifferent Actions as Duties, we apply a good Intention to all our moſt indifferent Actions, we make our very Exiſtence one continued Act of Obedience, we turn our Diverſions and Amuſements to our Eternal Advantage, and are pleaſing him (whom we are made

made to please) in all the Circumstances and Occurrences of Life.

It is this Excellent Frame of Mind, this *holy Officiousness* (if I may be allowed to call it such) which is recommended to us by the Apostle in that uncommon Precept, wherein he directs us to propose to our selves the Glory of our Creator in all our most indifferent Actions, *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do.*

A Person therefore, who is possessed with such an habitual good Intention as that which I have been here speaking of, enters upon no single Circumstance of Life, without considering it as well-pleasing to the great Author of his Being, conformable to the Dictates of Reason, suitable to human Nature in general, or to that particular Station in which Providence has placed him. He lives in a perpetual Sense of the Divine Presence, regards himself as acting, in the whole Course of his Existence, under the Observation and Inspection of that Being, who is privy to all his Motions and all his Thoughts, who knows his *down-sitting and his up-rising, who is about his Path, and about his Bed, and spieth out all his Ways.* In a Word, he remembers that the Eye of his Judge is always upon him, and in every Action he reflects that he is doing what is commanded or allowed by Him who will hereafter either reward or punish it. This was the Character of those Holy Men of old, who in that beautiful Phrase of Scripture are said to have *walked with God.*

When I employ my self upon a Paper of Morality, I generally consider how I may recommend the particular Vertue, which I treat of, by the Precepts or Examples of the ancient Heathens; by that means, if possible, to shame those who have greater Advantages of knowing their Duty, and therefore greater Obligations to perform it, into a better Course of Life: Besides, that many among us are unreasonably disposed to give a fairer hearing to a Pagan Philosopher, than to a Christian Writer.

I shall therefore produce an Instance of this excellent Frame of Mind in a Speech of *Socrates*, which is quoted by *Erasmus*. This great Philosopher on the Day of his Execution, a little before the Draught of Poison was brought to him, entertaining his Friends with a Discourse on the Immortality of the Soul, has these Words. *Whether or no God will approve of my Actions I know not, but this I am sure of, that I have at all times made it my Endeavour to please him; and I have a good Hope that this my Endeavour will be accepted by him.* We find in these Words of that great Man the habitual good Intention which I would here inculcate, and with which that Divine Philosopher always acted. I shall only add that *Erasmus*, who was an unbigotted Roman Catholick, was so much transported with this Passage of *Socrates*, that he could scarce forbear looking upon him as a Saint, and desiring him to pray for him; or as that ingenious and learned Writer has expressed himself in a much more lively manner, *When I reflect on such a Speech pronounced by such a Person, I can scarce forbear crying out* Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis. *O holy Socrates, pray for us.*

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